

Panagiotis Agapitos (tr.), *The Tale of Livistros and Rodamne: A Byzantine Love Romance of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021. Pp. 224.  
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Panagiotis Agapitos' translation of the mid-thirteenth-century romance *Livistros and Rodamne* does justice to one of the great works of Byzantine literature through one of its great scholars. A. restores the poetry to the poem, in terms of both its verse layout and the pleasures of its inventive diction and intricate structure. The translation, based on A's 2006 Greek edition, will allow readers of English to access this text in ways that more closely mirror the anonymous poet's authorial voice than the hitherto standard prose translation of Gavin Betts (in *Three Medieval Greek Romances*: Routledge 2018 [1996]). Though Betts's translation has the advantage of combining in a single volume *L&R* with two other Palaiologan romances (*Velthandros and Chrysanza* and *Kallimachos and Chrysooroi*), A's translation should become the definitive version of *L&R*.

What makes A's translation especially useful is that its author never loses sight of the fact that *L&R* is, quite simply, an excellent yarn, albeit a very tangled one. As the tale opens, a young aristocrat named Klitovon is telling Myrtane about a man he met (Livistros) as they travelled lovelorn along a narrow road. Livistros was unschooled in love, until a dream from Eros tells him to seek out a certain princess Rodamne. He finds her and vanquishes the Egyptian king to whom she is betrothed, and the pair run off to live in the marvellous Silvercastle. But then the Egyptian king returns and, with the help of a Saracen witch, makes Livistros seem to have died and steals Rodamne away. It is here that Livistros, upon awakening, meets Klitovon, and the two rescue Rodamne and behead the witch. Livistros and Rodamne are married and Klitovon marries Rodamne's sister Melanthia. Sadly, however, Melanthia dies soon after, and Klitovon marries his first love, the Queen Myrtane to whom he has just narrated the whole story.

The intricacy of this narrative-within-a-narrative structure facilitates a wide array of inventive narrative modalities: within the typical novel/romance framework, *L&R* contains dream sequences and dream interpretation; philosophical discourses on love; an allegorical poem on the months as various kinds of men; letters, songs, occult incantations, and *ecphrases* on marvels of art and architecture. Within the narrative as ring composition, then, are embedded narratives within narratives, each a stand-alone piece of sophisticated rhetoric and at the same time an integral part of the narrative as a whole.

Though A. explains the volume's lack of footnotes as stemming from his hope that 'readers should enjoy reading the Byzantine amorous tale' without distractions, *L&R* sits at the intersection of several important cultural developments, both diachronically within the Greek tradition and synchronically with various cultures on the empire's increasingly permeable borders. Many of these are discussed in the substantial and informative introduction. He writes, for instance, that '*L&R* is a learned text, in the sense that its author uses specific devices from both the Ancient Greek and Komnenian [e.g. twelfth-century] novels and that he employs a poetical rhetoric that comes directly from high-level schooling while also employing the devices of folkloric poetry, creating

a very particular blend of learned and popular style' (9). The work thus draws heavily on the Greek past, both its immediate and more distant predecessors in the novel/romance tradition (15–17) while also, as a work written in the vernacular register, anticipating the literary style of modern Greek that would come to dominate in the following centuries. But A. rightly situates *L&R* not just within a diachronic Greek tradition; from a synchronic perspective, he also shows the influence of the western and, to a lesser degree, Persian and Arabic literature that circulated freely in the late-medieval eastern Mediterranean (17–22). Thus, the work is a hybrid of the ancient and medieval Greek tradition and the western romance tradition epitomized by Chrétien de Troyes and others that infused other works in the empire's last centuries.

Since its inception a decade ago, the Translated Texts for Byzantinists series has established itself as among the most important publishers of medieval Greek fiction. The first volume in the series, Elizabeth Jeffreys' *Four Byzantine Novels* (2012) made accessible to Byzantinists and general readers these long-neglected works. The upshot of the decade of scholarship since *Four Byzantine Novels* is that the novels and romances, long dismissed as stylistically artificial, poor imitations of the tradition of the ancient novel, intellectually superficial, or marginal to Byzantine and medieval European literature, have undergone a reevaluation that has disproved each of these caricatures. A's own scholarship has been instrumental in this reevaluation. Though a few minor typos mar this otherwise excellent volume (e.g. for Silvercastle: Silvecastle on p.18, Silverscastle on p. 36, and Silverastle on p.53), this volume, the culmination of what he calls 'a passionate affair that gave me many hours of bittersweet pleasure' over the past three decades, gives audiences the chance to explore this 'intriguing Byzantine Greek narrative' (ix). It's a chance they would do well to take.

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Florin Leonte, *Imperial Visions of Late Byzantium: Manuel II Palaiologos and Rhetoric in Purple*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. Pp. 344  
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A refined inspection of the literary legacy of one of late Byzantium's most important emperors is conducted in *Imperial Visions*, by Florin Leonte.

Although the overarching purpose is to supplement political history, the focus on Manuel's rhetorical texts makes this less useful as a general history of his reign. Although L. is clearly well-acquainted with the entirety of Palaiologan authors and late Byzantine history in general, and provides relevant context on Manuel's life and times, this study does not aspire to be a new stand-alone history. Readers seeking such